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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6656
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1060
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8475
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9005
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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: CHURCH BURNING IN HILL TRACTS

¶1. (U) On April 2, local newspapers reported that arsonists burned down a church in the remote village of Lambopara in the Khagrachhari Hill District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, apparently in retaliation for the conversion of local Buddhists to Christianity.

¶2. (SBU) Two Bangladeshi journalists, an area political leader, and a field officer of a Bangladeshi intelligence service confirmed to us this account. Within the last year, they said, some 19 Lambopara families from the Buddhist Chakma tribe had converted to Christianity, and on March 20 they had erected a tin-roofed church building. On March 30, local leaders reportedly held a community gathering on March 30 to remonstrate with the converted Christians and their action to build a church.

¶3. (SBU) The chairman of the Khagrachhari district council told us there is disagreement on who owns the land where the church was built, and that the Buddhist Chakmas had wanted to build a pagoda on the site where the church stood.

¶4. (SBU) Christian missionaries based in Chittagong told us that tribal communities frequently ostracize converts for their perceived disloyalty to custom and family, but normally the community ends up accepting the change, and the converts reintegrate into community life. In this case, tensions escalated, they noted, because of the dispute over the land in question.

¶5. (SBU) The intelligence field officer told us that the converted Christians, at the advice of local law enforcement, have moved to the sub-district headquarters in Panchari for personal security. He indicated they would likely return to their homes soon.

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